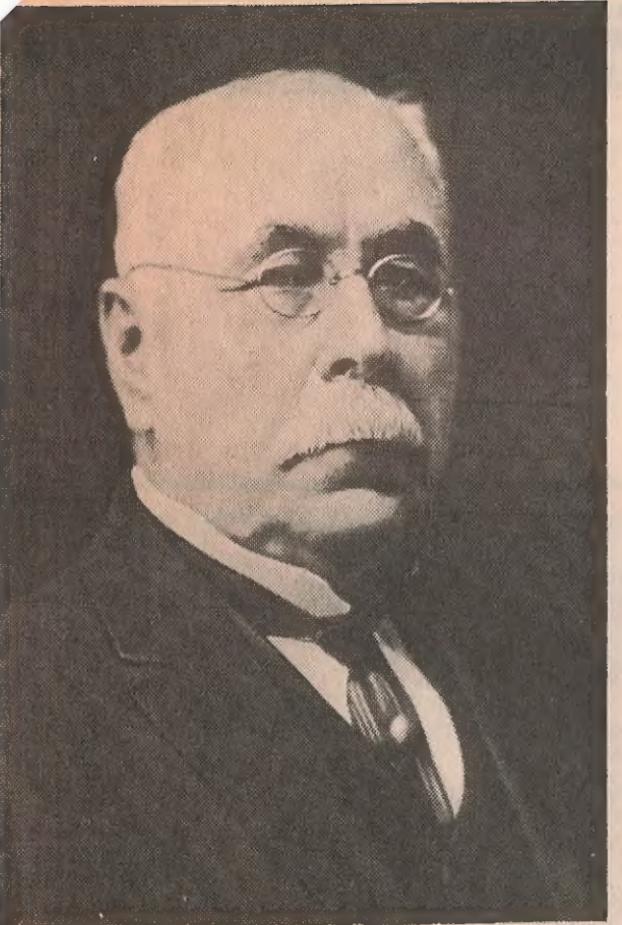


Jesse Knight: Legend in His Own Time



JESSE KNIGHT

By THERON H. LUKE

Jesse Knight...

The name is a legend in Provo. He became a legend in his own time, but it grew in the memories of those who knew him ... and, as legends inevitably grow ... long after his death in 1921.

He is remembered today for his wealth, which grew and ebbed with the economic fortunes of his time. But there was much more to the man than that. He used his wealth in copious amounts to help his church (Mormon) and what he very probably regarded, in an entirely unselfish way, as his school — Brigham Young University.

How much he gave to each will never be known publicly, but the amounts were undoubtedly huge.

The story told long after his death by the late George Fitzroy seems to symbolize the man. George Fitzroy had arrived from the east, a

gentle, lonely, not knowing whether he wanted to stay in Provo, Utah, or not. A man rode up on a beautiful white horse, looked the lonely stranger over, dismounted, walked over and shook his hand. "I'm Jesse Knight. Welcome to Provo."

George Kitzroy said he never really felt lonely after that day.

How much money did Jesse Knight have? Again, perhaps no one today knows — but in his peak his net worth could easily classify him as a millionaire. How many million? Who knows today, or who cares? But at various times he had land interests in South America and Canada (the city of Raymond, Alberta, Canada, is named for his son) mining interests in the Tintic area, and perhaps elsewhere, hydro - electric power plants, and extensive business interests, including the Knight Woolen Mills.

His "company" town, to house and serve the workers in

his Tintic mines, was Knightsville. It was said to be, and no one has yet proved the statement untrue, the only mining town in the West without a saloon. "Uncle Jesse" as everyone called him, saw to that. Knightsville today is a few rock and concrete foundations of a once thriving mining town. But like Jesse, it was different — and anyone with a thirst had to go elsewhere to satisfy it.

Jesse Knight was born in 1845 in Nauvoo, giving him deep roots in the Mormon society. He came to Utah as a boy with his family and experienced the same kind of hardships — and the joys of freedom and open spaces — that came to all on the frontier.

His first venture was a ranch near Payson which became, by indirection, the turning point in his life. A family crisis and the death of a child from what must have been typhoid from the ranch well turned him toward

religious conviction, and it stayed with him during his life.

The famous Humbug mine in the Tintic area was where he hit it big and his fortunes began to turn. The story of its name is a fascinating one. With the late John Roundy, who became one of his trusted managers, he was driving a tunnel by hand into the mountain. As they stopped for lunch, he asked Roundy if he would prefer stock in the mine or cash for his wages.

"What!" exclaimed Roundy, "that humbug?" Undaunted, and with a sly sense of humor, Jesse gave the name to the mine. It paid off handsomely. Whether Roundy ever had stock in it we don't know, but as a trusted assistant he certainly profited from Uncle Jesse's good fortune and business acumen.

The front portion of the Berg Mortuary today is the mansion he built for his family. Not terribly large as mansions went in those days (14 rooms) it

had a stateliness about it seldom seen in more utilitarian Mormon homes. The Berg family made every attempt to retain the architecture and character of the building. Inside alterations were of course necessary, but the front room, on the west, is still as it was when the Knight family lived in it.

Although a millionaire, Uncle Jesse kept a cow in the stable which still stands in the rear and has been converted into a garage and living quarters. He also kept a fine team and carriage because in those days that was your automobile, but the cow was an added touch of the common man that Jesse never lost.

Always interested in his community, he took an active part in movements that he considered were for civic betterment. When the anti - liquor movement swept Utah and the nation, resulting in the Volstead Act and Prohibition,

Jesse was part of a foursome that stumped the county raging against the evils of demon rum. From the journal of the late Thomas N. Taylor can be read accounts of this quartet, which included besides Uncle Jesse and "T.N." the late United States Senator Reed Smoot (who was senator at the time) and a man named Boshard. "T.N." according to the journal, apparently did most of the speaking, with the other three sitting as civic symbols of law and order and foes of John Barleycorn.

Jesse Knight was a legend in his own time. He was also a man who gave untold amounts of money to his church and his university, and to how many individuals no one will ever know.

He was a man who would ride up to a lonely stranger, shake hands and say, "I'm Jesse Knight. Welcome to Provo."

It tells as much about him as the money he gave away.

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